2: Mitchell E-5 (1946-1949) 1956 FT7 Yao FT7

of sorcery, but the representative takes no part in the proceedings at all; he is outside them and is there merely to see that affairs are conducted fairly.

The Value Attached to the United Village

The third aspect, the dominant theme in all speeches, is the emphasis on the position of the headman as a leader of a corporate group, and his duty to maintain its unity. The chief and the officiating headmen warn the successor about the possibility of conflict in the village. They advise him to settle differences at once lest these should lead to a split in the village. They also warn him that his wife's relationships with her sisters-in-law, living as she is, virilocally,[1] are a danger point and may lead to trouble. The danger from the 'husbands' who are members of other villages and whose loyalties do not lie directly with the new headman is made manifest to him. At Nyenje's ceremony the officiating headman remonstrated with Nyenje's sisters because some had left the village without giving him an opportunity to settle their differences. The frequent references to the danger of sorcery are also references to the fear of the breakdown of the village. The villagers are exhorted to respect the headman and to be obedient to him for the general welfare of the group as a whole. Regularly the image of the tree and its branches is invoked, and it is made clear that the headman is dependent on his people for his rank and status, and they on him for their unity.

The disintegration of a village in Yao eyes is a sad affair and the disruptive forces in it must be very strong before a section leaves it. People who want to leave a village are usually remonstrated with and told not to 'break' it. In the frequent conflicts between the headmen and their younger brothers the arbitrators usually try their utmost to prevent a migration. They always award compensation to the injured party and tell the disputants to live in peace, and not to leave the village. Frequently, however, the leader of the dissident group prefers to refuse the compensation money, which is often as much as £6 or £7, and

[1] i.e. living with her husband's kin. I use 'virilocal' and 'uxorilocal' in preference to the older but ambiguous terms 'patrilocal' and 'matrilocal'. See Richards, 'Some Types of Family Structure amongst the Central Bantu', 208-9.

2: Mitchell E-5 (1946-1949) 1956 FT7 Yao FT7

strike out with his adherents to found a new village. A sum of £6 or £7 is a considerable amount in everyday Yao life where the annual cash income of the average individual is not much more. The leader of a dissident group is prepared to forgo this wealth to get one foot on to the lowest rung of the political ladder—that is by becoming a village headman.

Obversely there is a great deal of sentiment attached to the idea of a united village. To the Yao way of thinking a village is broken by fighting or death, and these evils are linked by witchcraft beliefs. The association of death and the break-up of the village is brought out clearly by the funeral ablutions of villagers after the burial of one of their number. An important ingredient in the medicine with which the mourners wash themselves after the funeral, is *cikula*. It is the earth from a particular type of termitary which is usually about 12 to 18 inches high, upright and almost cylindrical. The crust is very brittle and it is comparatively easy to chip off a piece. When this is done a mass of internal chambers and passages is revealed. The soldier ants, unlike those of other species that retreat into the darkness of their passages as soon as they are exposed, come into the open daylight and swarm in confusion over the fractured termitary. When I questioned my informant about *cikula*, he kicked the crust off the top of one of the hills and said, 'See all the houses in the village of the ants? I have broken their village. So it is with death. It breaks the village.'

The Yao believe that death 'breaks the village' and that conflicts through sorcery lead to death. Therefore, conflicts are the real cause of village splits. Hence differences must be settled immediately if the village is to persist, because if they last too long one of the aggrieved parties is sure to start using sorcery against its opponents. Those who do move away, go to a distant place because they believe that sorcery operates only where there is social interaction. But the fear of sorcery on the other hand is just as strong a force in maintaining the physical unity of the village. It is while the migration is being planned that sorcery is most likely to be used. This is particularly so if the village break is taking the form of a lineage split. This happened, for example, in Lupunje village.

Kalambo, the sister's son of Lupunje, wanted to leave the village and had gone to seek a suitable site. When he returned he found that

2: Mitchell E-5 (1946-1949) 1956 FT7 Yao FT7

part of the normal duties of a matrilineage leader to his kinsmen.[1] But ideally each marriage is supposed to have two marriage sureties. The first, or senior, surety is called *nkukwegoma*, which was described to me as 'the log that lies at the doorway'. The picture here is of a wise old man who cannot move around too easily, but who sits at the doorway of his hut ready to give advice and information to his younger kinsmen. In contrast to this is the junior surety. He is called *nkupamene* or the 'bender down of dew'. He is pictured as a young man, who is vigorous about his daily tasks and who is waiting before the dew has evaporated in the morning, at the door of couples who have difficulties. He is essentially the 'one who walks about'.

The senior marriage surety is ideally supposed to be a mother's brother, while the junior marriage surety is supposed to be a brother. In fact, while the junior marriage surety is almost always a brother, though not necessarily an elder brother, the senior, for reasons which will emerge later, is frequently not a mother's brother. However, in the Yao mind the two are fixed in the relationship to each other as mother's brother and sister's son. The fundamental conflict of their positions is expressed by the opposition of the concepts of the 'recumbent log' and the 'active man'. This view is consistent with the segmentation and internal differentiation that must go on within a lineage. As the segments of the matrilineage become progressively independent of each other, the senior relatives, who formerly held them together, become less and less active in their affairs. In Yao idiom they become 'recumbent logs'.

The relationship between mother's brother and sister's son therefore is fundamentally ambivalent. By the values surrounding the concepts of descent and relationship, a sister's son and mother's brother are close kin and bound together in their attachment to a common ancestry and to a common set of living women who are in their joint care. At the same time the mother's brother, belonging as he does to the parental generation, must be respected by his sister's sons. Recalcitrant sister's sons may be made to toe the line by a number of different sanctions. A mother's brother, for example, may take his case to an arbitrator and bring the force of public opinion to bear upon his

[1] I have described the rôles of the marriage sureties more fully in *Marriage among the Machinga Yao*.

2: Mitchell E-5 (1946-1949) 1956 FT7 Yao FT7

604 627 • sister's son. This, however, is not common because matters such as these, the Yao feel, ought to be settled within the matrilineage, or at least among kinsmen. The more usual procedure is for the mother's brother to take his complaint to some senior matrilineal relative who may be a perpetual mother's brother of the mother's brother, as my Cibwana Kawinga is to Cikoja.[1] Or if the matrilineage is part of a village, the mother's brother may take his case to his village headman, who is as likely as not his perpetual father. The senior relatives have the force of authority and public opinion behind them and frequently some agreement can be reached at this level. Where this is not possible, say because the perpetual elder relative lives too far away, the mother's brother may take the sister's son to court and bring the sanction of the Native Authority's punishment upon him. This is very rare.

604 781 There is still a certain mystical sanction behind the mother's brother's control over his junior relatives. This is based on the curse, which in turn draws on the belief in common ancestor spirits. A mother's brother may say to a sister's son or other junior matrilineal relative: 'If you have never sucked from the breast of my sister, nothing dreadful will happen to you.'[2]

604 759 The fear of sorcery is another force which operates to control the wayward activities of a sister's sons. People in senior generations are usually looked upon as having particularly wide knowledge of potent medicines. Though a sister's son may sometimes use sorcery against his mother's brother, the reverse is believed to be more likely to happen. I have recorded elsewhere[3] the details of a case where a sister's son left a village, against his mother's brother's wishes, to find work in town. He subsequently met his death in an accident while trying to get the honey out of a wild bees' hive in a treetop. At home his death was attributed to the sorcery of his mother's brother whose will he had frustrated.

604 678 On the other hand the sister's sons, while bound by an ethical code to honour and respect their mother's brothers, find that in fact these stand in the way of their own personal ambitions. A man's heir is his sister's son and it is quite understandable that there should be some tension between a man and his heir. But

[1] See p. 130. [2] See Chap. VI, p. 133.
[3] 'A Note on the African Conception of Chastity', 305.